

IC Forum 2024

What is peace?

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Messe and Congress Center Basel (MCH)

Take Aways

Introduction

The IC Forum 2024 was dedicated to the question: "What is peace?". Valuable insights were shared through engaging discussions. Here are the key takeaways:

- Importance of peace
- Tolerance of different opinions promotes trust
- Breaking silos
- Peacebuilding at all levels
- Creating opportunities for peace by addressing the root causes of conflict
- Peace is more than an absence of war
- Factchecking is crucial to peace

Importance of peace

The panellists emphasised that peace diplomacy and peacebuilding will become increasingly important in the current geopolitical environment, requiring perseverance, political courage and dialogue with all stakeholders, and that Switzerland must continue to invest in these efforts. President Viola Amherd and President Sahle-Work Zewde stressed that women must be more actively involved in peace diplomacy and peacebuilding than they have been in the past.

Tolerance of different opinions promotes trust

Opinions differ regarding the definition of peace and the structure of multilateral organisations. Switzerland put forward the key question 'what is peace?' for precisely that reason. Promoting international understanding is one of Switzerland's foreign policy priorities, and it continues to enjoy great trust in this area. Switzerland can therefore play a key role in overcoming the east–west and north–south polarisation that can paralyse major international conflict resolution processes. The IC Forum has demonstrated the need to take a determined and realistic approach towards conflict zones such as Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan as well as conflicts that generate very little press coverage.

Breaking silos

The IC Forum highlighted another of Switzerland's strengths: its ability to respond flexibly to highly volatile conflict situations by deploying a range of instruments and combining them effectively. These include mediation, peacebuilding, development and economic cooperation, humanitarian aid and diplomatic skills. Switzerland will be more likely to achieve its goals if it manages to combine foreign policy instruments more effectively and align them with issues such as the environment, climate change, security, human rights, migration, food systems, culture and peacebuilding. It will be necessary to continue breaking mental and institutional barriers – one of the FDFA's key concerns. However, it can also continue to strengthen interdepartmental cooperation in this area.

Peacebuilding at all levels

Peacebuilding at various levels was discussed in the breakout sessions. Despite the difficult circumstances in West Africa for example, Switzerland is still achieving results by supporting local actors on an equal basis to improve living conditions for local communities through a combination of humanitarian aid, development promotion and peacebuilding. Although national challenges remain, Switzerland is improving the situation for local civilians, creating the prospect of a brighter future and building the trust needed to negotiate a peace agreement further down the line. Switzerland is a key

player in the Colombian peace process. Including all social groups and civil society in the process has contributed to its success.

Creating opportunities for peace by addressing the root causes of conflict

Participants saw that while certain issues, such as natural resources, can trigger conflicts, they can also facilitate peaceful cooperation. However, this can only be achieved if decisions regarding access are transparent and society as a whole has an interest in and supports the solutions found.

Peace is more than an absence of war

The 'Security and Peace' panel noted that regional and national security and conflict prevention mechanisms will increasingly be deployed in future, taking on the tasks currently performed by multidimensional UN missions. It is essential that such mechanisms achieve broad-based human security in future, not just security secured militarily. This does not just mean an absence of war, but enabling civilians to develop their full potential, for example through good governance, democracy, human rights and education. These factors must dovetail with an agenda for peace and conflict prevention.

Factchecking is crucial to peace

War zone reporting and events coverage are greatly influenced by government and media interests. But fake news has also become more widespread. As a result, one of the biggest and toughest challenges in highly polarised conflicts is to ensure access to fact-based information. Supporting an independent media and facilitating factchecking is therefore crucial to peace.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – SESSION 01

Nexus for Peace in West Africa

What is important?

- **Invest in prevention:** the example of Benin shows how important it is to invest in prevention in order to counter the expansion of armed groups.
- **Combine the soft and the hard:** peacebuilding efforts are particularly effective when they combine dialogue formats (soft) with concrete improvements in the realities of people's lives (hard), for example improved access to health services or education infrastructures, etc. The nexus approach enables us to combine different instruments (peace, development, humanitarian) appropriate to the context.
- **Include women:** inclusion of women is essential, not only for effective peacebuilding, but also, as scientific evidence has shown, for sustainable development. The peace circles in Mali are one example of how women's voices can be amplified.
- **Building on long-term trust:** the Sahel is at the centre of geopolitics. However, Switzerland's position in this scenario is a privileged one. Switzerland is still seen as a long-term, neutral partner that has always worked alongside the poorest people. Switzerland has a lot of experience of working in West Africa and can build upon well-established relationships with a variety of partners. It is important to continue this work. New approaches are not necessary, but consistent implementation of basic principles (promotion of inclusive processes, support for local peace initiatives, making space for dialogue and a range of voices, etc.)

- **Locally led support:** peace is built over the long term, locally led and with the involvement of the communities. To achieve this, we need to work with actors who know the context and can move within it. The achievements and experiences at the local level need to be communicated and negotiated at the political level. Political dialogue that is rooted in local realities becomes meaningful and has greater potential to foster change.

What are the key factors for change?

- In societies where more than half the people are minors, investing in young people is key. Integrating them and creating better prospects will be crucial for the future.
- Climate change is aggravating conflicts in the region as temperatures are rising rapidly, Climate adaptation is therefore important for sustainable conflict resolution.
- Women play a key role in terms of social cohesion and as guardians of cultural heritage – they must be taken seriously as important drivers of change.
- The sovereigntist discourse builds on a broadly shared sense of desire for self-determination – the call for African solutions to African problems must be respected.

What is needed for the future?

- Maintaining spaces for dialogue even in difficult times and the Swiss principle of speaking with everybody are valuable in this polarised environment.
- Alleviating suffering and combining humanitarian aid with long-term activities for peace and development.
- Supporting young people to give them perspectives for the future and investing in them is crucial for the future of the region.
- Promoting social cohesion and inclusive governance at local level needs to be continued.
- Promoting the integration of women and minorities in political decision-making processes.
- Being committed to partnerships on an equal footing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – SESSION 02

How to overcome violence

What is important?

- It is complex to overcome violence.
- We believe in human rights, the right to information and the right to freedom of expression. If there is no recognition of this need, independent media cannot exist.
- Looking at the media, not just for communication purposes, but also to ensure that various viewpoints are covered. Media to open up spaces.
- The loudest voices should not be the most important ones.
- Media does not create a single narrative; it provides different perspectives and ultimately people can choose how they act.
- 63% of participants think that narratives play a crucial role in understanding contemporary conflicts, rating them 5 on a scale of 1-5.
- In terms of the relevance of narratives, the contemporary conflicts that come to mind are Ukraine and Israel/Palestine.

What are the key factors for change?

- Trust, solidarity and universality are the core principles of an effective collective security system.
- We need to rebuild trust and stability from the bottom up and from within.
- Interventions do not allow peace to be built without the leadership of local and national partners and international, local and national connections.
- We know that including women in peacebuilding processes increases the chances of success.
- People construct different narratives. Who decides which narrative is the right one?
- Civil society and young people are best suited to creating peace narratives.

What is needed for the future?

- We tend to forget that not everyone is online. Only half the population is digitally active every day. Also reaching people in their own language is important, so that they can grasp what is going on.
- Greater transparency, with officials and other people in positions of power admitting that they "don't know", could reduce fear and misinformation.
- No one really wants to be monitored. Everyone wants to be safe online.
- AI, etc. will make it even more challenging to know which narratives are out there and which one is the right one.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – SESSION 03

Peace process in Colombia

What is important?

- **Comprehensive peace process:** the peace process in Colombia incorporates various elements, including the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC-EP, ongoing negotiations with the ELN and the EMC FARC-EP, and efforts to negotiate with other active armed groups. This holistic approach aims to address the root causes of the conflict, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and ongoing dialogue in peacebuilding efforts.
- **Inclusive negotiation processes:** the involvement of women and inclusive practices are central to Colombia's current negotiations, with a female head of the government's delegation directing talks with the ELN, reflecting a broader commitment to incorporating diverse, historically marginalised voices into the peace process in order to achieve more widely accepted outcomes.
- **Public participation and civil society involvement:** ensuring that the peace process is participatory and includes input from across society is vital. This approach helps to build public trust in the process, fosters broader social buy-in, and ensures that the peace agreements reflect the actual needs and desires of Colombian society. Also, this approach is vital for the legitimacy and sustainability of peace. The results of the Mentimeter survey show that most people see the role of civil society as promoting civic education and advocating for the inclusion of marginalised voices.
- **International support and collaboration:** the role of international bodies like the UN and countries such as Switzerland as guarantors and supporters of the peace process is crucial. Their involvement provides the necessary political support, monitoring, technical support, and financial assistance, facilitating the continuation and success of peace negotiations.

What are the key factors for change?

- **Addressing root causes:** a fundamental driver for sustainable peace in Colombia involves tackling the underlying issues that fuel the conflict, such as land disputes and social inequalities. The peace agreement from 2016 emphasises comprehensive reforms, including land reform and the establishment of a transitional justice system aimed at addressing these root causes directly.
- **Engagement of active armed groups:** ongoing dialogue with all active armed groups, including the ELN and newer factions, are essential to a holistic peace strategy. Engaging these groups in dialogue and negotiations prevents the exclusion of key actors who would otherwise be likely to undermine the peace process through continued violence.
- **Implementation and monitoring of ceasefires:** effective implementation and rigorous monitoring of ceasefires and other preliminary agreements are crucial to maintain momentum in the peace process. These measures build trust between parties and are preconditions to creating an environment conducive to negotiating comprehensive agreements.
- **Switzerland's role:** the online participants had further ideas about Switzerland's role, such as developing tailor-made projects in remote regions of Colombia, and including the Swiss-Colombian diaspora, students, and universities. Furthermore, it is important that Switzerland takes local contexts and specifically the visions of ethnic territories and communities into account.

What is needed for the future?

- **Expansion of government control and services:** the government needs to significantly increase control over its territory to provide security and public services in all regions. This is essential in order to fill any power vacuums left by demobilising groups and prevent new groups from emerging.
- **Sustained commitment to comprehensive peace implementation:** moving forward, a commitment to full implementation of the 2016 peace agreement is crucial. This does not just involve adhering to the terms agreed, but also continuously adapting strategies to address evolving challenges and dynamics within the country.
- **Continued support from the international community:** the ongoing involvement of international bodies and foreign governments will remain essential. Their support, in terms of mediation, monitoring, and financial assistance, will help ensure the stability of the peace process and aid the implementation of complex agreement components.
- **Integration of transitional justice:** effective transitional justice mechanisms are vital to addressing the grievances of victims and ensuring accountability for past crimes. This aspect of the peace process is crucial to reconciliation and preventing the recurrence of conflict.
- **Economic and social development initiatives:** for lasting peace, it is critical to pair the peace process with robust development initiatives that address poverty, inequality, and lack of infrastructure, especially in the most affected rural areas. Economic development will also create opportunities that will stop profits being generated from conflict, such as illicit drug production and trafficking.
- **Government reforms and regulations:** the online participants also mentioned the importance of reforming rural areas, strengthening laws, developing regulations on drugs, supporting mental health, boosting jobs, enhancing education, and fighting corruption. To achieve this, it will be necessary to include minorities in politics.

- **Engagement and empowerment of local communities:** local communities must be actively involved in the peace process and subsequent developments. Empowering local leaders and ensuring that community needs and voices are heard and addressed will be key to maintaining peace and fostering community resilience.
- **Strengthening democracy and political participation:** strengthening democratic institutions and promoting wider political participation will be essential. Ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes and governance systems that reflect the diverse makeup of the Colombian population will support long-term stability and peace.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – SESSION 04

Water and Peace

What is important?

- Access to water is a basic human right.
- Water cooperation has historically been tested as a way of strengthening (regional) cooperation, stabilising peace, overcoming armed conflict, and building peace – water can be a tool for reconciliation and an instrument for peace.
- In today's conflicts, water is usually not the root cause, but often a victim.
- Upstream – downstream relations: in transboundary interactions, water resources must be used effectively and equitably, ensuring no harm is caused during the process. Both principles must be applied and respected. There is a growing political determination to establish suitable regional frameworks for fostering such cooperation, however it is up to activists to boost this determination.
- The impact of water scarcity disproportionately affects women as they often undertake long journeys to fetch water for their families. This constitutes a violation of their human rights.
- In Afghanistan, the declining ground water level is alarming and could lead to another disaster in the region.

What are the key factors for change?

- Recipe for success: common visions and goals through close co-operation between the national governments and a strong civil society.
- Connecting on a human level is essential when talking about peace and trust building.
- To effectively catalyse youth engagement, it is crucial to recognise their role - not only as activists, but also as young professionals and experts. This entails leveraging their expertise and involving them in local communities where most of the water and peace work is conducted at the grassroots level.
- Sharing common experiences in water management is essential for building trust.
- It is necessary to work with local actors. What is the most effective approach to involve local communities actively in decision-making regarding the management of shared water bodies? The majority of the online participants voted for "by conducting regular community meetings and consultations to gather input and feedback on water management plans and policies."
- Hold your leaders accountable for how they interact with countries that do not respect the right to water.

What is needed for the future?

- The focus needs to be on preventing the weaponisation of water in conflict (i.e. targeted destruction of drinking water facilities and wells; contamination of drinking water etc.)
- Provisions to protect water infrastructure from becoming targets should be included in the international law.
- Access to water should be guaranteed for everyone, including the most vulnerable. This is particularly crucial in light of the worsening water scarcity issues caused by climate change.
- Water issues should be addressed with an understanding of life's complexities.
- There is a need for greater recognition of water-related challenges. Water commissions must adopt gender-sensitive approaches to address the specific needs of women in accessing water resources.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – SESSION 05

Commodities and Peace

What is important?

- The energy transition presents a significant opportunity for resource-rich countries abundant in essential minerals, yet the terms of the transition are of great importance.
- It is vital to consider how the extraction of minerals affects communities and climate change.
- We should avoid repeating the same mistakes made in commodities and oil trading.
- Due diligence generates a lot of data. We must ensure everyone has adequate resources to manage this data.
- We need to invest in order to meet the future demand for minerals, e.g. copper

What are the key factors for change?

- Civil societies and communities should be at the core of the just transition, e.g. through public debates.
- Sourcing countries need to be key actors in the value chain and invest in refining minerals to add value for those countries.
- We must not overlook the role of the private sector. It has a responsibility to combat corruption and facilitate a just transition.
- Governments and international partners must work together.
- We need to involve communities in discussions to address externalities and collaborate globally.
- Global tax reforms & international regulators are needed to ensure a just and peaceful transition and mitigate risks.
- Good infrastructure in extracting countries is required in order to meet the demand.

What is needed for the future?

- The energy transition must be founded on accountability and transparency, which governments can provide.
- There is a need for global cooperation, regulation, and legislation on mining and distribution.
- It is important to focus on cooperation with developing countries.
- Community engagement is essential. Many mines are yet to be established and are located in regions with marginalised communities. We must listen to the needs of these communities.

- We should invest in the circular economy and implement taxes to make extraction more expensive than recycling.
- Commodities can bring benefits if sourced and distributed responsibly, as seen in countries like Australia, Norway, Botswana and Chile.
- A more sustainable future for all is only possible through dialogue and cooperation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – SESSION 06

Security and Peace

What is important?

- **Research-backed effectiveness:** research shows that multi-dimensional peacekeeping has a positive impact on reducing conflict and violence and fostering long-term stability.
- **Switzerland's neutrality and global peace:** Switzerland's active role in peacekeeping operations, within the framework of UN mandates, aligns with its neutrality and commitment to international peace.
- **Global scepticism:** the decreasing confidence in UN multidimensional peacekeeping missions necessitates innovative approaches to peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is increasingly spearheaded by regional organisations.
- **Community and gender inclusivity:** engagement of local communities and integration of women are pivotal for the success of peacekeeping missions.

What are the key factors for change?

- **Regional partnerships:** collaboration with regional organisations is crucial to capacity building and local legitimacy in peacekeeping efforts.
- **Respect for international humanitarian law:** Switzerland can play a key role in standard-setting to ensure that peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations comply with international humanitarian law.
- **Integration of civil society expertise:** leveraging the contributions of NGOs and civil society provides valuable insights for more effective peacekeeping.
- **Training and education:** focused training initiatives are necessary to improve peacekeeping strategies and operations.

What is needed for the future?

- **Promotion of the WPS agenda:** advancing the role of women in peacekeeping is essential to comprehensive and successful missions.
- **Sustainable peace strategies:** peace operations must evolve towards more holistic and inclusive strategies that address the root causes of conflict. The term 'security' needs to be redefined and broadened
- **Utilisation of Swiss expertise:** Switzerland's expertise and experience in diplomacy, peacebuilding, training, and humanitarian aid are key resources for supporting peace operations.
- **Long-term commitment:** advocating for enduring engagements in peace operations that prioritise prevention and systemic solutions to conflicts.